

Our Opportunities for Service

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When we began our time at Brigham Young University, many of us anticipated the day of graduation with excitement and longing. Now, as we are here celebrating our achievements and the completion of the requirements established by our various disciplines, we are perhaps wondering how this day has finally arrived and what the following days, weeks, months, and years will bring. We are humbled by the realization of the help we have received along the way. As a representative of this graduating class, I would like to thank our families, friends, professors, administrators, and the millions of Church members who have contributed to this university—and, by extension, to our education—through tithing funds. We are truly blessed to have been a part of such a supportive system.

As we leave the cradle of BYU, we are charged to take with us our knowledge and experiences to “go forth to serve.” Often we do not know in

what forms the opportunity for service will come, but the responsibility remains. While I was on my mission in Hungary, I met a woman named Mária Erdős, who exemplified the spirit of charitable service. During the German occupation of Hungary during World War II, her family opened their cellar to three young Jewish men attempting to escape deportation to the concentration camps. During this time signs were posted throughout her town threatening those who were hiding Jews and encouraging people to be on the lookout for suspicious signs—such as additional laundry hanging out to dry—that might indicate families who were harboring Jews. Despite these dangers, Mária’s family continued caring for the three men.

Unfortunately, one of them became sick. The family tried to nurse him back to health, but it became apparent that he was in need of real medical attention. Summoning a doctor, however, would mean risking their safety because

Megan Holmes spoke as the representative of her graduating class at BYU commencement on August 16, 2001.

of possible betrayal. Taking the advice of some friends who testified to his trustworthiness, Mária approached the head doctor of her town's steel factory. On her way to the hospital to consult with Dr. Döffinger, Mária encountered a crowd gathered around a man who had been hanged from a lamppost. There was a sign tied around his neck that read, "Jew-hiding traitor. This is what happens to all traitors to their homeland."

Mária, justifiably, was deeply disturbed by the scene. She knew the man and his family and struggled to understand and face her fears. She said, "He was a miner with six children, the father of a truly good Hungarian family. . . . I walked in front of this and read [the sign] and thought . . . of the Jews in our cellar. . . . You don't know what it was like for me walking all the way down the main street [to visit the doctor] after seeing the sight of the hanged man."

Despite her fears, Mária approached the doctor with her situation, and he agreed to help. Consciousness of the danger they faced made him share many of Mária's reservations. She recalled, "[He] believed at first that I was testing him or something, but after that, we read in each other's eyes that everything was in order." Dr. Döffinger did indeed visit the family that evening, and through the course of several visits, they became close friends. The Jewish young man was nursed back to health. He survived the war in the Erdős' cellar.

I have often asked myself how Mária summoned the strength and courage to serve in this way. Her view is best summed up in her own words: "I didn't need thanks for [my actions]; I fulfilled my obligation." Mária saw serving her fellowmen as a duty, a responsibility, and a privilege. She believed in the beauty and value of each individual life. She recognized that "the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:10). Although we may never find ourselves in a situation as dramatic as Mária's, we are faced with the same challenge of recognizing the divine importance of those

with whom we come in contact. When we see those around us as sons and daughters of God, it is impossible to deny or belittle their worth and potential. We have a mandate to help and serve those around us—not just because of the humanity that we share but also because of the divine attributes that we have each inherited.

Besides appreciating the divine worth of others because of their inheritances from God, it is vital that we see this same value within ourselves. We are children of God. As such, we have the potential to one day become as He is. This is a long journey, with mistakes and bumps along the way. But it is beautiful.

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught us:

*There is something of divinity within each of you. You have such tremendous potential with that quality as a part of your inherited nature. Every one of you was endowed by your Father in Heaven with a tremendous capacity to do good in the world. Train your minds and your hands that you may be equipped to serve well in the society of which you are a part. Cultivate the art of being kind, of being thoughtful, of being helpful. Refine within you the quality of mercy which comes as a part of the divine attributes you have inherited. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Light Within You," *Ensign*, May 1995]*

For many of us, this may be the end of our formal training, but it does not mean the end of our education. The charge given to us by a prophet of God will continue throughout our lives. We are asked to make our society a better place. We are asked to be good, kind, thoughtful, helpful, and merciful. Refining these characteristics within ourselves will help us to become closer to God by recognizing our own potentials, seeing the attributes of God within others, and helping our fellowmen see and value those qualities within themselves. May we use our education, time, and talents in this worthy pursuit is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.